

Was Scrooge a Republican?

By John B. Larson

As this year draws to a close and we find ourselves in the holiday season, many of our thoughts turn towards our need to spend time with friends and family, to make sure our gift giving is completed and to remember the names of everyone we want to receive our holiday and season's greeting cards. We fight the traffic around the malls, prepare for visiting relatives and ready ourselves for the new year. This season is also a time we extend a hand of compassion and goodwill to our fellow citizens. Regardless of what holiday each of us celebrates, there is no doubt that this is a time of reflection and indeed a busy season.

Unfortunately, for nearly 12,000 Connecticut citizens, the end of the year will also bring an end to their federal unemployment assistance, which will be terminated today. During this toughest of economic times, across the nation on that date, approximately 750,000

Americans without jobs will begin losing their assistance of about \$280 per week. Though not an insignificant amount, when we consider how hard it is to meet the needs of even one person on that

amount, meeting the needs of an entire family on this amount when someone is between jobs is, for sure, extremely difficult.

Currently, workers who are laid off from their employment can receive 26 weeks of unemployment assistance. However, this past March, recognizing the difficulty of economic times, Congress granted a 13-week extension for those Americans who were still looking for work. This action, in fact, is something that is quite normal during a period of economic recession. To pay for these benefits, the federal insurance trust fund provides as much as \$24 billion for the sole purpose of meeting the needs of those who cannot find work and require assistance. In November of this year, recognizing the still continuing need to provide assistance, the U.S. Senate passed legislation to once again extend these benefits beyond Dec. 28. Unfortunately, the Republican leadership in the House of Representatives did not take up the bill that would extend benefits to families, choosing not to

address the issue before adjourning for the year.

In recent years and months, each week seems to bring more news of layoffs in our state, especially in our financial services and defense industries. In this struggling economy, losing a job can be devastating, and finding re-employment quickly in a job that pays enough to provide for a family gets harder and harder. Long-term unemployment in America is at a 10-year peak with 1.7 million people unemployed for at least six months, which is double the number in August 2001. The federal assistance provides a safety net intended to try and keep workers and their families afloat during the period that people are searching for a new job.

Yet when it comes time to take simple action to benefit those in need as the economy falters, the Republican leadership is frozen in the ice of its own indifference towards the unemployed.

The people I talk to and who contact my office yearn for the dignity of having a job that can support them and their family and are searching very hard for it.

Numbers of people haven taken low-paying jobs for which they are overqualified because they want to work and provide income for their families. This income, however, is far short of the amount needed to make ends meet.

Since 2001, the Republican leadership in the House has swiftly passed billions of dollars in tax cuts,

a large percentage of which primarily benefit the very wealthiest Americans, quickly returning the nation to deficit spending, even as our needs at home and our obligations abroad grow. Yet when it comes time to take simple action to benefit those in need as the economy falters, the Republican leadership is frozen in the ice of its own indifference towards the unemployed. This sends a very cruel holiday present to hundreds of thousands of American workers and families, making Scrooge look like a compassionate conservative.

So, as many of us enjoy the season and fulfill our many holiday obligations, one of my thoughts during this season of giving will be to focus on the need for the leadership in Congress to act as quickly as possible to fulfill its obligations to those whose unemployment assistance has been terminated.

Democratic Rep. John B. Larson, represents Connecticut's 1st Congressional District.

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